



WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH IN OKLAHOMA



*From The
National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health*

State Profile 2002

*Delivering on the Nation's promise:
Safety and health at work for all people through prevention.*

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health

NIOSH is the primary federal agency responsible for conducting research and making recommendations for the prevention of work-related illness and injury. NIOSH is located in the Department of Health and Human Services in the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The NIOSH mission is to provide national and world leadership to prevent work-related illness, injury, disability, and death by gathering information, conducting scientific research, and translating the knowledge gained into products and services. As part of its mission, NIOSH supports programs in every state to improve the health and safety of workers. NIOSH has developed this document to highlight recent NIOSH programs important to workers and employers in Oklahoma.

The Burden of Occupational Illness and Injury in Oklahoma

- In Oklahoma, there are approximately 1.6 million individuals employed in the workforce.¹
- In 2000, 82 workers died as a result of workplace injuries.²
- The agriculture, forestry, and fishing industry had the highest number of fatalities, followed second by transportation and public utilities, and third by construction.²
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data are available, the rate of fatal workplace injuries was 6 deaths per 100,000 workers—above the national average rate of 4.5 deaths per 100,000 workers.²
- In 2000, there were 67,100 nonfatal workplace injuries and illnesses in Oklahoma.³

The Cost of Occupational Injury and Illness in Oklahoma

In 2000, the most recent year for which data are available, a total of \$417.5 million was paid for workers' compensation claims by Oklahoma private insurers, self-insured employers, and state funds.⁴ This figure does not include compensation paid to workers employed by the federal government and also underestimates the total financial burden for private sector businesses, since only a fraction of health care costs and earnings lost through work injuries and illnesses is covered by workers' compensation. Chronic occupational illnesses like cancer are substantially under-reported in workers' compensation systems because work-relatedness is often difficult to establish.

How NIOSH Prevents Worker Injuries and Diseases in Oklahoma

Health Hazard Evaluations (HHEs) and Technical Assistance

NIOSH evaluates workplace hazards and recommends solutions when requested by employers, workers, or state or federal agencies. Since 1993, NIOSH has responded to 20 requests for HHEs in Oklahoma.

Fatality Assessment and Control Evaluation (FACE) Investigations

NIOSH developed the FACE program to identify work situations with a high risk of fatality and to formulate and disseminate prevention strategies. In Oklahoma, FACE is conducted by the state's Department of Health, under a cooperative agreement with NIOSH. Since 1995, there have been 17 FACE investigations in Oklahoma, including the following recent example:

Oklahoma: Rancher Killed by Overturned Tractor

On August 10, 2001, a 59-year old rancher died when the tractor he was operating overturned. The victim had been mowing tall grass along an embankment of a creek approximately five feet in height, when the embankment collapsed. The tractor rolled into the creek coming to rest on top of the victim in approximately two feet of water. The tractor was generally in good operating condition but was not equipped with a roll-over protective structure or a seat belt. FACE investigators concluded that to prevent similar occurrences, employers should: maintain tractors and farm equipment in safe operating condition, including original safety-related features and any retrofits, such as roll-over protective structures and seat belts, designed and recommended by the equipment manufacturer; inspect areas in which mobile equipment is to be operated to identify and control actual and potential hazards; and familiarize themselves and their employees with farm safety documents and training materials.

Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program

The purpose of the NIOSH Fire Fighter Fatality Investigation and Prevention Program is to determine factors that cause or contribute to fire fighter deaths suffered in the line of duty. NIOSH uses data from these investigations to generate fatality investigation reports and a database of case results that guides the development of prevention and intervention activities. The following fire fighter fatality investigation was conducted in Oklahoma:

Oklahoma: One Fire Fighter Died and a Second Was Severely Injured on an Interstate Highway

On August 5, 1999, two fire fighter crews responded to a single car crash on a wet and busy interstate highway. The fire trucks were parked near the median wall, one behind the other, with emergency lights on. Approximately 2-3 minutes after arriving on scene, one of the fire trucks was hit from behind by a second car. While two fire fighters attended to the injuries of that car's driver, a third car whose driver lost control, began spinning backwards. Traveling backwards, the third car struck the two fire fighters and injured driver they were helping, throwing them almost 50 feet from the point of impact. One of the struck fire fighters was killed, while the other fire fighter and the second car's driver were seriously injured. NIOSH recommendations to fire departments responding to highway incidents included: implementing standard operating procedures regarding emergency operations; ensuring that fire trucks are safely positioned and protect fire fighters from traffic; ensuring that oncoming vehicles are safely controlled; and positioning personnel and victims in a secure area.

Building State Capacity

NIOSH funds the Adult Blood Lead Epidemiology and Surveillance Program (ABLES) in the Oklahoma Department of Health. Through ABLES, Health Department staff track and respond to cases of excessive lead exposure in adults which can cause a variety of adverse health outcomes such as kidney or nervous system damage and potential infertility.

Extramural Programs Funded by NIOSH

The following is an example of recent research grants, training grants, or cooperative agreements funded by NIOSH in the state of Oklahoma.

University of Oklahoma

NIOSH funds a training program at the University of Oklahoma, College of Public Health, that aims to recruit Native Americans into the field of industrial hygiene, provide support for a technically strong industrial hygiene management program, and strengthen current educational activities through the recruitment of students with diverse backgrounds. The majority of the students recruited, with females and racial and ethnic minorities well represented, come from states in the region. In fiscal year 2001, 59 students were enrolled and 15 students were graduated.

Additional information regarding NIOSH services and activities can be accessed through the NIOSH home page at <http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/homepage.html> or by calling the NIOSH 800-number at 1-800-356-NIOSH (1-800-356-4674).

¹U.S. Department of Labor (DOL), Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), Local Area Unemployment Statistics, Current Population Survey, 2000.

²DOL, BLS in cooperation with state and federal agencies, Census of Fatal Occupational Injuries, 1999-2000.

³DOL, BLS in cooperation with participating state agencies, Survey of Occupational Injuries and Illnesses, 2000.

⁴National Academy of Social Insurance, *Workers' Compensation: Benefits, Coverage, and Costs, 2000 New Estimates*, May 2002.

